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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP MONTEVIDEO 8968
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 003579

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SUBJECT: HUMALA'S HEADACHES: FROM ALMOST PRESIDENT TO HAS-BEEN?

REF: A. LIMA 3487

¶B. LIMA 3349

Classified By: Pol Officer David C. Brooks, for Reasons 1.4 (c,d).

¶11. (C) Summary: In three months, Ollanta Humala has gone from nearly winning the June 4 presidential election to wrestling with a divided and increasingly rebellious congressional bloc and becoming a defendant in a serious human rights case. While Humala's wounds are largely self-inflicted, his inability to influence congress and his status as criminal defendant could push him off the mainstream political stage and/or embrace more radical options. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) Not long ago, radical nationalist candidate Ollanta Humala seemed poised to become the next president, and to turn Peru into the latest conquest in Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' regional Bolivarian revolution. Humala won the first round of balloting April 9 with 31%, easily edging out surprise second-place finisher Alan Garcia, and seemingly assuring himself and his supporters of a significant plurality in the future congress. Even after a series of missteps, the backfiring of Chavez' open interventions in Peru's political campaign, and the tenuous electoral alliance against Humala of APRA, UN, the Fujimoristas and other smaller groupings, the radical UPP/PNP candidate only narrowly lost in the second round of voting on June 4. In short, Humala seemed to represent a real force in Peruvian politics.

¶13. (SBU) Fast forward to August 24, when congress voted in favor of endorsing the Garcia government's cabinet. In that vote, Humala's fragile Union por el Peru (UPP) and Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) coalition effectively split (ref B). The entire UPP Congressional bloc (21 representatives with one absence) abstained. Even representatives of the PNP, Humala's core political vehicle, divided: 18 followed Humala's direction and voted against the cabinet and the remaining two abstained. All other congressional representatives, totaling 75, endorsed the cabinet for an easy government win. While Humala criticized the abstainers, denouncing them for having taken an "ambiguous" position on the Garcia Government, his grip over his coalition had manifestly slipped and, partly as a result, his coalition's influence in congress was severely damaged.

¶14. (U) To add to his troubles, Humala was formally charged

with human rights violations on August 31 (Ref A). In an effort to strike back, Humala gave a September 1 press conference in congress accusing the Garcia government of trumping up the legal case against him. That the charges are broadly seen as credible, and that only twelve of his 20 PNP congressional representatives stood by his side as he made the announcement, made Humala's protestations of politicized justice sound hollow. Related news reports that Humala allies had attempted to bribe witnesses to change their testimony and that he might be seeking political sanctuary in certain foreign embassies further undermined his argument. In the aftermath of Humala's formal charging, Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo described Humala as having "a persecution complex," while President Alan Garcia advised him to "remain calm."

¶5. (C) Comment: Humala's apparent collapse has been precipitous, but it is too early to pronounce him out of play. His authoritarian, rabble-rousing style clearly works less well in post-election Peru, and he has no favors to dispense and therefore fewer means to compel obedience in Congress (ref A). But while his waning influence on the mainstream traditional political stage may be a positive development, it could also have other consequences. For example, having failed as a "normal" political player, he could be compelled to embrace unambiguously a more radical option. The political appeal of a re-radicalized Humala will depend at least as much on the current government -- whether it is seen as addressing the needs of Humala's electorate -- as on the former candidate's own actions.

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